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Title Analysis

Poetry Title Analysis

The denotative meaning of “Barbie” is the nickname for the female name Barbara as well as the name of a doll owned by the toy company Mattel. Barbie’s character is famous for being tall, thin, beautiful, blond, and successful. Since her creation in 1959, Barbie has been an astronaut, a veterinarian, a lawyer, a teacher, a soldier, the president of the United States, a firefighter, a Nascar driver, and many other various positions. Barbie owns a pink house, a pink car, fashionable outfits, and lives an ideal life. She has become the role model for countless young girls despite her impossible lifestyle, and continues to impact modern females with her image of perfection. The title of the poem “Barbie Doll” has a strong relationship with the poem’s subject because the girl in the poem attempts to make herself as flawless as a Barbie doll.

The word “Barbie” is usually associated with the idea of a girl who is fake, oftentimes ditzy, and impractically perfect. It also connotatively describes a girl who tries too hard to obtain the perfection that society has led her to believe is necessary. This portrayal is an accurate description of the main character in the poem. The girl was “healthy, tested intelligent, possessed strong arms and back, abundant sexual drive and manual dexterity” (7-9). The girl in the poem is obviously a normal, healthy young woman. However, in the eyes of her peers she is flawed. "Everyone saw a fat nose on thick legs” (11). Despite her strong mind and body, the girl is convinced that she is ugly. To counteract this view, she attempts to transform herself into someone who will be approved of by society. "She was advised to play coy, exhorted to come on hearty, exercise, diet, smile and wheedle” (12-14). By working so diligently to become the perfect person, she has allowed herself to fit the description of a Barbie doll.

"Barbie" is the name of a commercially distributed doll, but it is also slang for "barbiturate." A barbiturate is a drug that depresses the nervous system of the human body, causing mild sedation to total anesthesia. This definition relates to the girl in the poem as she has numbed herself to her own feelings and allows others to control her. The wishes of the world around her act as barbiturates to dull the girl's sense of pride in her natural beauty.

"Doll" is a small figure representing a human being, often used as a child's toy. This description is ironic because the girl does not represent a human being but rather a person who is attempting inhuman behavior. "Doll" is also used as a slang term for a pretty but expressionless or unintelligent woman. Toy Barbie dolls are expressionless because they are inanimate objects while human "Barbie dolls" are expressionless because their obsession with beauty has dulled their emotions. Children can control a doll's actions and appearance in the same manner that society has dictated the lifestyle of the girl in the poem. In the way that a Barbie doll shows young girls what society wants them to be, the advisors in the poem set an example of what is expected of a girl by giving her toy ovens and lipsticks rather than teaching her to value herself as she is.

By striving to achieve perfection, the main character in the poem “Barbie Doll” has emulated the obsessive nature of a Barbie doll. This impersonation of the Barbie character illustrates the connection between the poem’s content and its title.

Works Cited

Piercy, Marge. “Barbie Doll.” R., Thomas, and Greg Johnson Arp. *PERRINE'S LITERATURE: STRUCTURE, SOUND, AND SENSE. Ninth edition.*. Belmont, CA: Thomson/Wadsworth, 2006.

